

Alameda County
Congestion Management Agency



Program Evaluation **Executive Summary**

MAY 2006

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (CMA) Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) Program has been in operation since April 9, 1998. This report presents the results of the eighth annual program evaluation and covers program operations during 2005 including comparison with previous years. The evaluation provides information about:

1. The effectiveness of the program's administration;
2. Statistics on employer and employee participation and trips taken;
3. The program's success in causing an increase in the use of alternative modes; and
4. Recommendations about any area(s) that need modification or expansion.

This executive summary includes a program description, overview of historical trends, summary of major findings of the evaluation, and program recommendations.

Program Description

The Alameda County CMA Guaranteed Ride Home Program is sponsored by the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (CMA) and is funded with Transportation Funds for Clean Air (TFCA) from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

The GRH Program provides a "guaranteed ride home" to any registered employee working for a participating employer in cases of emergency on days the employee has used an alternative mode of transportation to get to work. Alternative modes include: carpools, vanpools, bus, train, ferry, walking and bicycling. Participating employers must have at least 100 employees at worksites located in Alameda County. As of December 31, 2005, 131 employers and 3,638 employees were registered with the program.

The objective of the program is to maximize modal shift from driving alone to commute alternatives including transit, carpools, vanpools, bicycling and walking. Based on this stated objective, the program can be considered a success. Each year of operation, the program has seen an increase in the number of participants who use alternative modes and an increase in the frequency with which they use alternative modes.

Historical Trends

The Guaranteed Ride Home Program began as a demonstration program in 1998. Over the course of the last eight years, GRH has grown into a smoothly operating program with 131 registered employers, about 3,600 registered employees, and 82 trips provided this year.

Seventy-two (72) employers registered with the program during the initial six-month demonstration period. Another 28 registered during the 1999 operating year, and 19 registered during the 2000 operating year. In 2001 and 2002, 13 and 12 new employers joined the program, respectively. In 2003, fourteen employers registered. Sixteen (16) new employers registered in 2004. A total of 22 employers registered this year. The program now has 131 participating employers.

During the initial six-month demonstration period, about 880 employees joined the Guaranteed Ride Home Program. Another 794 joined during the 1999 operating year, and 591 in the 2000 operating year. In 2001 and 2002, 494 and 525 new employees joined, respectively. In 2003, the number of new employees registered was 710. In 2004, 543 new employees registered and in 2005 603 new employees registered. The program now has 3,638 registered employees.

A total of 1,050 trips have been provided from the time of the Program's inception through the end of 2005. During the 2005 operating year, 82 trips were taken, a sharp decrease from recent years (148 in 2001, 144 in 2002, 149 in 2003 and 141 in 2004). Most registered employees (90%) never take a trip. Of those who have taken trips, the vast majority (79%) have taken only one or two trips. This demonstrates the "insurance" nature of the program.

Based on the fact that each registered participant may take up to six trips in a one-year period, the rate that guaranteed rides are taken is very low. For example, at the end of 2005, there were a total of 21,828 potential rides based on a total enrollment of 3,638 employees. However, only 82 trips were actually needed that year (less than 1% of potential trips).

Figure ES-1 illustrates some key historical trends for the Guaranteed Ride Home Program.

Figure ES-1 Guaranteed Ride Home Program Historical Trends

Trend	1998¹	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
2005 Program Participants²								
Total Number of Employers	72	100	119	132	127	110	120	131
New Employers Registered	72	28	19	13	12	14	16	22
Total Number of Employees	880	1,674	2,265	2,759	2,664	2,785	3,268	3,638
New Employees Registered	880	794	591	494	525	710	543	603
Trip Statistics								
Total Number of Trips Taken	57	156	168	148	144	149	141	82
Total Number of Rental Car Trips	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8	10	18	9
Average Trips per Month	6.3	13	14	12.3	12	12.4	11.8	6.8
Average Trip Distance - Rental Car and Taxi combined (miles)	28.7	36.2	37.8	42.5	42.9	45.2	46.2	44.8
Average Trip Cost	\$54.41	\$64.29	\$69.73	\$86.37	\$88.07	\$94.19	\$85.40	\$91.10
Rental Car Savings	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$536	\$1,120	\$2,246	\$859
Survey Results								
Number of Surveys Collected	215	350	270	346	517	619	658	716
Survey Response Rate	N/A	21%	12%	12%	19%	22%	20%	20%
Percent Who Would Not Use an Alternative Mode without GRH	15%	16%	19%	19%	34%	41%	47%	46%
Increase in the Percent of Those Using Alternative Modes Four or More Times a Week	N/A	10%	15%	8%	15%	17%	14%	21%
Number of Single Occupancy Vehicle Trips Reduced per Week	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,768	3,946	3,774	3,378

¹ The Program began in April 1998.² The number of new employees and employers registered is actually higher than shown in the table. Some employers and employees have been deleted from the database due to job changes and employers going out of business. The numbers shown in the table are based on those currently registered in the database.

Major Findings of the Evaluation

The program evaluation consisted of an examination of the program's administrative functions, statistics on employer and employee participation and use, data from the surveys of participating employees, and recommendations for program changes and enhancements. The following sections present the major findings from the evaluation.

Program Administration

Program Operating Principles

- To be eligible for the program, employers must have 100 or more employees. According to employment data from InfoUSA, a total of 283,387 employees are currently eligible for the program. While some large employers throughout the county have not yet been contacted, it may be appropriate to review and evaluate this eligibility requirement in the coming year since there are several employers with less than 100 employees who have expressed an interest in participating in the program. The process of enrolling and getting an emergency ride home continues to work smoothly.
- The use limitation of six trips per year continues to be appropriate. Very few program participants reach the limit. No one in 2005 reached the six trip limit. The most trips taken by one person in 2005 was four.
- The rental car demonstration program was successfully implemented in October 2002 in the Tri-Valley area (Dublin, Livermore and Pleasanton), and county wide in April 2004. The program realized an estimated savings of \$859 on ride costs in 2005. This is down sharply from last year due to the fact that there were fewer total rides in 2005. Program administrators began a rental car outreach program in 2005, which targeted three of the larger registered employers (NUMMI, Kaiser, City of Berkeley). In an effort to promote the rental car option, GRH staff wrote articles for company newsletters and had them post informational flyers around their offices.

Marketing and Promotions

- Approximately one-tenth of program resources are dedicated to marketing and promotion. This time is spent marketing both to employers and their employees in the form of making calls, distributing flyers, and giving presentations and attending events. The program has sought to leverage these resources by relying on participating employers to promote the GRH Program internally, and by seeking co-marketing opportunities with local transit agencies and with organizations that promote commute alternatives. In 2005, the program focused on increasing exposure of GRH by attending more events.
- The availability of the marketing materials in electronic format via the internet or email upon request continues to be a useful and inexpensive tool for promoting the program.

- In an effort to expand the program to more employees in Alameda County, program staff looked into allowing business districts to register for GRH. Initial guidelines and criteria for defining a business district were developed in 2005. Based on an analysis of potential business districts in Alameda County, it is not recommended that they be added to the program at this time due to potential increases in administrative costs to the program.

Employer and Employee Participation

Employer and Employee Registrations

- Both the number of new employers and new employees increased in 2005. As of December 31, 2005, 131 employers and 3,638 employees were registered.
- North and east Alameda County continue to be the areas with the most employers enrolled in the program. The City of Oakland is the location of the largest number of employers registered with the program followed by Pleasanton.

Trips Taken

- From the program's inception in 1998 through 2005, a total of 1,050 trips (1,005 taxi trips and 45 rental car trips) have been taken. Eighty-two (82) trips were taken during the 2005 calendar year for an average of 6.8 trips per month. The number of trips taken in 2005 represented a sharp decrease in rides compared to recent years.
- Ninety percent (90%) of the employees enrolled have never taken a trip. Of the 511 employees who have taken a trip since program inception (1998), 79% have taken only one or two rides.
- Personal Illness was the most common reason for taking a trip in 2005 (28% of trips), followed by family member illness (26%).
- Those who carpool or vanpool are more likely to use a guaranteed ride home trip than those who use other alternative commute modes. Sixty-five percent (65%) of guaranteed rides home were used by car- and vanpoolers.
- The average trip distance decreased in 2005. The average trip distance for all trips in 2005 was 44.8 miles. The average trip distance for rental car trips only was 79 miles down from 2004 (108 miles) and an increase from 2003 (72 miles).
- The average taxi trip cost in 2005 was \$91.10 up from last year's total of \$85.40. This could be due to the increase in fares (from \$2 a mile to \$2.50 a mile) at Tri City Cabs in 2005. The fare increased due to the rise in gasoline costs.
- The cost of a rental car trip is \$55.00. It is estimated that the use of rental cars in 2005 saved \$859 in trip costs. This is down sharply from last year due to the fact that there were fewer total rides in 2005.

Employee Commute Patterns

- The most common trip-origin cities are Oakland and Pleasanton. The most common trip-destination cities are Oakland, Manteca, and Modesto.
- The most common trip destination county is Alameda County, followed by San Joaquin.

Employee Survey

The 2005 survey was distributed and completed primarily online. We attempted to contact all employer representatives (some were non-responsive despite repeated attempts) to request their assistance with the distribution of the survey. When employers were not available or by special request, we contacted employees with the survey directly. Of the 3,638 employees currently enrolled in the program, 716 surveys were completed, resulting in a 20% response rate. Of them, 97% of the surveys were completed online. The respondents represent 55 different participating employers.

Use of Alternative Modes

The Guaranteed Ride Home Program continues to be successful in encouraging the use of alternative modes. According to 2005 survey responses:

- When asked how important GRH was in their decision to stop driving alone, 71% of respondents who used to drive alone said that it was at least somewhat important. Most, 63%, of all respondents reported that the GRH program encourages them to use alternative modes more days than they would otherwise. If the GRH Program were not available, the majority (54%) reported that they would continue to use an alternative mode.
- The survey asked respondents how they traveled to work at present and before they registered for the GRH program. Both before and after the program, the most common modes were BART, driving alone, and carpooling.
- Using these survey findings, we are able to extrapolate the impact of the program on travel behavior of all participants. The program reduces 3,378 single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips per week.

Other Commute Characteristics

- Commute distances are generally 50 miles or less (87%). Nearly half (46%) are between 11 and 35 miles.
- Most (71% each) program participants travel to work during peak commutes hours of 7-9 AM.

Customer Service Ratings

The survey includes two questions to evaluate participant's level of satisfaction with the customer service provided in the program. Additional information on service satisfaction is collected in the survey participants return after they have taken a ride.

- The administrative functions of the GRH Program continue to receive very high ratings for the quality of customer service, consistent with previous years' evaluations.
- Passengers were very positive in their evaluation of the transportation services provided through GRH.

Employer Survey

The 2005 program evaluation includes the second survey of employer representatives. The survey was distributed and completed by mail. The employer survey was differentiated from the employee survey to lessen the confusion for the employer contacts. Of the 131 employers currently enrolled in the program, 41 surveys were completed, resulting in a 31% response rate.

Use of Alternative Modes

The survey asked the employer representatives how important the program is in encouraging employees to use alternative commute modes more often. A large majority, 95%, reported that they feel participation in the program encourages more alternative mode use.

- The survey asked respondents if their company offered additional commuter benefits to employees. Most employers (63%) reported that they do provide other transportation subsidy programs. The results show that most participating companies are actively promoting alternative modes.

Program Management

- The survey asked respondents how long they have managed the program for their company. Over 75% have been with GRH for one or more years. When asked about the workload that GRH presents, employers overwhelmingly (100%) reported that their workload was manageable or they have time to do more.
- The survey results showed that employer contacts still need better information and instructions for using instant enrollment vouchers. About one-third (32%) of the respondents reported that they did not understand the instant enrollment process. In addition, 80% stated that they have never issued an instant enrollment voucher.

Customer Service Ratings

The survey includes two questions to evaluate the employer representatives' level of satisfaction with the customer service provided in the program.

- “Clarity of information” provided by program staff received very high ratings. When asked about the hotline assistance they received, 69% of the respondents stated that they received “good” or “excellent” service and 31% reported that they “did not know”.

Recommendations

Recommendations for 2005, made in the 2004 report, and their outcome include:

Recommendation	Outcome
Consider purchasing a database listing of eligible employers	This recommendation was implemented in 2005. The database was purchased and staff has called about one-third of the companies on the list leading to several new registered employers.
Require that all non-emergency trips of 50 miles or more (during rental car company’s business hours) use the rental car service	Not implemented in 2005, but outreach and research were conducted throughout the year. Program is recommended to be implemented in 2006 along with implementing a rental car marketing campaign.
Consider developing guidelines and consolidating program for business districts with a primary point of contact	A preliminary study was conducted over the past year and results showed that GRH should not go forward with the business district program this year due to administrative and cost effectiveness issues.
Consider having a new poster and marketing materials to promote the program	This recommendation was implemented in 2005. The new posters will be distributed to employers in Spring 2006.
Create and distribute new materials that help employer representatives with the instant enrollment process.	This will be implemented in Spring 2006. Project staff will send out new informational flyers to all employer contacts and update the instant enrollment information on the GRH website in May.

1. Continue to implement a comprehensive marketing approach.

In 2006, it is recommended marketing efforts focus on 1) co-marketing with other programs promoting commute alternatives, such as 511.org; 2) direct marketing to employers; 3) maximizing program exposure via the internet and other media; and 4) maintenance marketing and outreach activities directed to inactive (or minimally active) employers throughout Alameda County. Following is a further explanation of some of these efforts:

- **Continue co-marketing efforts with other organizations that promote commute alternatives.**

The GRH Program should continue to focus on building partnerships with other organizations that promote commute alternatives, including 511.org, local transit agencies, vanpool providers and commute benefit providers (such as Commuter Check).

- **Contact inactive, or minimally active, employers who are already enrolled.**

The program should also continue to contact employers with very few or no registered employees in order to increase employee enrollment among those employees who are already eligible for the program. These outreach efforts will also help staff identify those employers who are no longer interested in participating in the GRH program.

- **Continue to attend and participate in commuter fairs and related events.**

We will continue to work with regional organizations and Alameda County employers to stay abreast of the various commuter-oriented events in the area. These efforts have proven to be one of the most effective methods of registering new employees and employers. It is important to become involved to not only attract new participants, but as was the case with Oakland CarFree Day, receive free media coverage.

- **Focus marketing efforts along transit corridors.**

The program should focus marketing efforts along established transit corridors in Alameda County, such as San Pablo and International Boulevard. Businesses in these areas are more likely to employ workers who commute by transit and would be interested in the GRH program.

2. Evaluate the impact of expanding the rental car program countywide.

The evaluation of the rental car program is displayed in Chapter 3. A similar evaluation of the countywide program should be conducted in the 2006 program evaluation report. The program realized an estimated savings of \$859 on ride costs in 2005. This is down sharply from last year due to the fact that there were fewer total rides in 2005. Program administrators began a rental car outreach program in 2005, which targeted three of the larger registered employers (NUMMI, Kaiser, City of Berkeley). In an effort to promote

the rental car option, GRH staff wrote articles for company newsletters and had them post informational flyers around their offices.

3. Continue administering an annual Employer Survey.

The 2004 and 2005 surveys provided beneficial data about the program from the company's perspective. An annual survey of employers will be a helpful tool in gaining information regarding marketing and customer service.

New 2006 Recommendations

1. Update the GRH Website.

In an effort to increase exposure to the program and make information and materials easier for users, updates should be made to the website, such as exploring new and updated images and creating a separate section for employers and making website consistent with CMA format.

2. Require that all non-emergency trips of 50 miles or more (during rental car company's business hours) use the rental car service and decrease the eligibility requirement for employers from 100 to 75 employees if there is no significant impact to the GRH budget.

Requiring that non-emergency trips of 50 miles or more use rental cars, with limited exceptions, can be implemented alone, while reducing the number of employees should only be implemented concurrently with the 50-mile car rental program. Implementing these two recommendations together can offset any possible initial increase in program costs associated with reducing the number of employees per employer. The rental car recommendation should provide increased savings over the current rental car requirements, while lowering the employee requirement may add some costs when first implemented.

In 2005, a marketing campaign was initiated to target larger employers and provide materials and information about the rental car option. Through the marketing campaign, various parameters were defined for the implementation of the 50 mile rental car requirement. The program currently encourages all participants to use the rental car service for trips over 20 miles, but there is no method of enforcement. The program should require that all trips of 50 miles or more use the rental car option, except for certain circumstances such as graveyard shifts (when rental car is not available) and for certain types of the emergencies when driving a car is not possible.

By allowing companies with 75 or more employees to register for the program, GRH will become accessible to more people while having a minimal impact on the program. Implementation of this change would require contacting new employers, making updates to printed materials and the website. Most of the costs are expected to be incorporated into the proposed marketing and administrative costs.

According to InfoUSA, a company that tracks businesses throughout the United States, Alameda County has 2,350 companies with 100 or more employees (131 or 6% are currently registered with GRH) and 3,641 companies with 50 or more employees. InfoUSA does not have a tracking category for 75 employees, but by splitting the difference of the two numbers in half, 75 employee companies would account for about 670 prospective employers. However, not all employers will register with the program. Currently only 6% of eligible companies are registered. Six percent of 670 would account for about 40 new companies eligible for program if the cap is reduced to 75 employees. Although 40 companies would represent a sharp increase in employer and employee registration, the companies would not register all at one time. The companies will also register for the program over a span of several years, which also makes the transition easier for the program administration.

If the 75 employee requirement proves successful and cost-effective, the GRH program should analyze program and cost needs for further reducing the number of eligible employees per employer to 50 including business districts.

3. Organize a Rental Car and Instant Enrollment Marketing Campaign.

Employers and employees are not fully aware of the benefits of the rental car option. In 2006, the program should organize and execute a campaign that provides more information regarding rental cars. This can be done through email and regular mail marketing materials. In addition, employer representatives have indicated that they need additional direction regarding the instant enrollment vouchers and the process of issuing them to employees. This can be a dual marketing campaign.

4. Analyze and Evaluate Cost and Logistics of Implementing a Car Sharing Option.

Review cost and logistics of working with a car sharing program to provide rides in addition to the rental car and taxi options. City Carshare currently has 18 pods (parking locations) dispersed throughout Berkeley, Oakland, and Piedmont. Employees would have to be registered for both GRH and the car share program to participate.

